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SUBJECT: PROFILES OF OPPOSITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

REF: TBILISI 3002

¶1. On December 6, the Central Election Commission registered thirteen candidates for the early presidential elections January 5 but only eight, including former President Mikheil Saakashvili, had sufficient signatures to meet the threshold to be registered as a presidential candidate. Following a period for verification and adjustment of names on the candidate's petitions, the final registration of candidates will be completed on December 11. Below are short profiles of the opposition candidates, including biographical information and the main points of their platforms as so far presented.

Levan Gachechiladze - Leader of
the United National Council

¶2. Levan Gachechiladze, born on July 20, 1964, is an economist-mathematician who graduated with a bachelor's degree from Tbilisi State University. Gachechiladze was elected to the current parliament as a majoritarian MP from Tbilisi as part of the New Rightist Party bloc, but he subsequently distanced himself from the New Rightists and joined the Democratic Front. Although he formally remains an MP, for the past two years Gachechiladze has not attended parliament sessions. From 2002 to 2004 Gachechiladze was a member of the Tbilisi City Council or Sakrebulo. From 1999-2002 he was a member of Parliament elected on the party list of the Shevardnadze-led Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG). From 1993 to 1999, Gachechiladze was General Director and then President of the Georgian Wine and Spirits Company. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Gachechiladze was engaged in various trade and commercial activities.

¶3. The central theme of the Gachechiladze campaign is changing the constitutional order of the country to a parliamentary system with a weak or non-existent president and possibly with a constitutional monarchy. Gachechiladze has indicated that he intends to resign as soon as Parliament passes the relevant constitutional amendments, and therefore his campaign program does not extend beyond a three-month period in power.

¶4. The main priorities of the program are:

- ensuring a special status for the Georgian Orthodox Church;
- return of illegally privatized national assets;
- development of Georgia as a "cultural bridge" between the East and the West;
- protection of Georgia's cultural heritage.

In the foreign policy sphere Gachechiladze advocates:

- "realistic" integration in NATO and EU;
- normalization of relations with Russia "instead of Saakashvili's unprincipled and incorrect policies;"
- restoration of Georgia's cultural-educational function in the Caucasus region.

In the sphere of resolution of Georgia's territorial conflicts, Gachechiladze advocates:

- implementation of special programs with the purpose of civic and economic integration;
- protection of the interests of IDPs;
- recognition of Russia as one party to the conflict with relevant legal consequences (i.e. removal of Russian peacekeeping forces).

In the social-economic sphere Gachechiladze advocates:

- freeing business from "state racketeering";
- eradication of "state criminal businesses," meaning government involvement in illegal deals;
- creation of institutional guarantees for establishing a competitive business environment.

15. Gachechiladze's campaign does not have one specific slogan, but he poses a choice: "There should be either Saakashvili, or Georgia." Gachechiladze's expressed goal is to see Georgia devoid of the institution of the president, and "more specifically, devoid of Saakashvili."

David Gamkrelidze -- New Rightist Leader

16. David Gamkrelidze, born April 2, 1964, is a medical doctor with a bachelor's degree from the Tbilisi Medical Institute. Gamkrelidze has been a member of Georgian Parliament since 1999. After being elected on Shevardnadze's Citizens Union of Georgia party list, Gamkrelidze soon formed the New Rightist Party and became its chairman. In the days of the Rose Revolution, Gamkrelidze's faction gave last-minute support to Shevardnadze at the November 2003 parliamentary session. In the March 2004 parliamentary elections

Gamkrelidze's party, in coalition with the Industrialist Party, was the only opposition force to overcome the 7 percent barrier for participation in Parliament. Gamkrelidze is a founder of Georgia's largest insurance company, Aldagi, and he served as chairman of its supervisory board until 1999. In 1998-1999 he was a member of the Tbilisi Municipal Council. In the late 1980s, Gamkrelidze practiced medicine and was an active member of Komsomol.

17. The central point of Gamkrelidze's campaign, under the slogan "In God We Trust and We Are Able," is changing the constitutional order and introducing a constitutional monarchy -- an idea initiated by Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II. Gamkrelidze stresses that while issues of such importance should be subject to public referendum, in his view the Patriarch would be the logical choice to serve as temporary regent in a constitutional monarchy. Gamkrelidze's program is also heavily focused on encouraging small and medium business.

In the foreign policy sphere Gamkrelidze advocates:

- Georgia's membership in NATO "as the best guarantee of territorial integrity";
- strengthening equal partnership relations with all neighbors of Georgia, including Russia;
- creation of a united economic space in the Caucasus region.

In the sphere of conflict resolution Gamkrelidze advocates:

- removal of CIS peacekeeping forces from the conflict territories;
- starting direct dialogue with the separatist authorities;
- encouraging active participation of the European Union and other international organizations in the process of conflict resolution.

In the social-economic and defense spheres, Gamkrelidze advocates:

- establishment of "genuine self-government" to include district and regional elections with separation of responsibilities between local and central governments.
- reallocation of defense spending to social programs;
- rearmament of the army to meet the NATO standards;
- providing free medical care to people over 65;
- providing financial assistance to families to increase the birth rate;
- providing 33 million GEL to the Georgian Orthodox Church for

damages inflicted upon it during Soviet times;
-- curbing the influx of migrant workers, and prohibiting immigration from China.

¶8. Unlike most opposition leaders, Gamkrelidze has never joined the United National Council, claiming that he does not support revolutionary change of power. He says his main goal is to "save the country from the grave future awaiting it in case of Saakashvili's reelection."

Shalva Natelashvili - Labor Party Leader

¶9. Shalva Natelashvili, born February 17, 1958, is a lawyer and holds a bachelor's degree from the Tbilisi State University and a doctorate from the Moscow Institute of International Relations. Natelashvili was a member of two parliaments, in 1991-1992 and 1995-1999, as a chair of the Labor faction. In the late 1980s, Natelashvili worked as a deputy prosecutor, prosecutor and a Communist Party committee secretary. Although the Labor Party was not represented in the Parliament after 1999, it is widely believed that it had overcome the 7% threshold for participation. Labor won a majority of seats on the Tbilisi City Council in 1998 and 2002.

¶10. The focal points of Natelashvili's campaign, under the slogan "Say Goodbye to the Past" are:

- elimination of the institution of the presidency;
- revocation of "anti-national legislation," by which is meant privatization of government-owned assets.
- direct election of governors, mayors, and police chiefs.

On human rights and fundamental freedoms Natelashvili advocates:

- immediate termination of political pressure and media censorship;
- strengthening civic society to ensure its oversight role over the government;
- revocation of all repressive laws infringing on basic human rights and freedoms;
- the release of political prisoners.

In the foreign policy sphere Natelashvili advocates:

- intensive continuation of the process of integration with NATO and EU, and parallel normalization of relations with Russia.

In the sphere of conflict resolution Natelashvili advocates:

- "immediate eradication of the threat of loss" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia;
- return of IDPs to their homes.

"There will be no hungry and poor people in our country," says Natelashvili, outlining his key social-economic issues:

- nationalization of illegally privatized property;
- providing considerable medical care benefits;
- drastically reducing unemployment;
- improved unemployment benefits;
- halving gas and electricity tariffs, and elimination of other payments for water, forest use, land use, small business development, etc;
- termination of the influx of illegal foreign migrant workers.

¶11. Natelashvili characterizes Saakashvili's government as a "bloodthirsty terrorist regime" which has enriched itself at the expense of Georgian people. Natelashvili actively participated in the November protest rallies organized by the United National Council, but he distanced himself from its leaders after he claimed they failed to invite him to discussions on their presidential candidate.

Irina Sarishvili - Leader of the Party of Hope

¶12. Irina Sarishvili, born January 2, 1963, is a philologist and holds a bachelor's degree from Tbilisi State University. In 2006

Sarishvili became leader of the Party of Hope, which is associated with the Moscow-based Party of Justice run by ex-Security Minister Igor Giorgadze, who is wanted for an assassination attempt on then-president Shevardnadze. In 1996 Sarishvili was elected leader of the National Democratic Party, a position she inherited from her late husband Gia Chanturia, who was assassinated in 1994. She held Shevardnadze personally responsible for the killing, although she also accused the Security Service (then run by Giorgadze) and Russia. In the period of the national-liberation movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Sarishvili was an active supporter of former President Gamsakhurdia, but turned against him as soon as he was elected president. In the beginning of Shevardnadze's presidency she served for a brief period as Deputy Prime Minister, but resigned when the decision made to join the CIS.

¶13. Sarishvili has not published her program and has not started an active campaign. Her slogan is "Truth Always and Everywhere." The key theme of Sarishvili's public appearances is criticism of Saakashvili's government, which she characterizes as essentially a "fascist regime."

¶14. The United Council refused to cooperate with Irina Sarishvili because of her affiliations with Igor Giorgadze, who lives in Moscow. Sarishvili is calling on all opposition candidates to support each other, since they are all united in their goal to depose Saakashvili.

Gia Maisashvili -- Party of Future

¶15. Gia Maisashvili, an economist, lived and worked in the United States as an economist for Enron. He returned to Georgia on the eve of the Rose Revolution of 2003 and became a consultant to then opposition leader Saakashvili. Maisashvili split with Saakashvili in early 2004 and subsequently founded an NGO, Government of the Future. Maisashvili spent the second half of 2004 lecturing in the United States. He returned to Tbilisi in December 2004 and announced his intention to try to unite "healthy political forces" to get rid of a government he branded as "ambitious, stupid, and incompetent." Maisashvili set up a Leadership School with the aim of raising a "a new generation of skilled, wise and courageous leaders." Maisashvili established his political party in July 2007 and announced his intention to run for presidency.

¶16. Maisashvili is actively campaigning by meeting with students, doctors and going door-to-door. He advocates "liberal values" and laissez-faire economics, without focusing on specific issues. Maisashvili's public speeches tend to be limited to slogans, such as: The Parade of Talent; God, Motherland, Future Generation; and As You Get Rich, the Others Will Get Rich Along With You.

¶17. Maisashvili announced recently that he would support Saakashvili in the event of a second round run-off against "oligarch" Badri Patarkatsishvili.

Badri Patarkatsishvili

¶18. Badri (aka Arkadi) Patarkatsishvili, business and media tycoon, was born in 1955 in Tbilisi. At the beginning of 1993 Patarkatsishvili moved to Moscow, reportedly with the help of his friend Otar Kvantrishvili (a known criminal kingpin killed in the mid-1990's). Patarkatsishvili started working at LogoVAZ as assistant to its general director, Boris Berezovsky. Patarkatsishvili was owner of 3.5% of shares and eventually was promoted to be first deputy director. In addition, Patarkatsishvili served as head of Lada-Engineering, an affiliate of LogoVAZ. Simultaneously, he was appointed assistant to the Commercial Issues General Director at Russian TV channel ORT. He became a significant shareholder in ORT and TV-6. In 1994-95 he served as vice-president of the Association of the Russian Automobile Dealers.

¶19. Patarkatsishvili reportedly played an active role in the "political games" of Berezovsky, who was involved in the automobile market and show business, and later the aluminum business, in Russia. In late June 2001, as Chairman of the Board of Directors of TV-6, Patarkatsishvili was charged with organizing an escape attempt

by Nikolai Glushkov, former deputy general director of Aeroflot. Russia's Prosecutor General put Patarkatsishvili's name on his wanted list.

¶20. In 2001, Patarkatsishvili was rated by GORBI and Georgian Times Publishing House among the top five influential Georgian politicians and candidates and "heirs to Shevardnadze's throne." Shevardnadze openly supported Patarkatsishvili, who invested in real estate, banking, construction, trade, show business and mass media in Georgia.

¶21. On November 9, 2007 the Georgian General Prosecutor's Office announced that Patarkatsishvili is suspected of conspiring to overthrow Saakashvili's government. On November 10, Patarkatsishvili announced his intention to for the presidency.

¶22. Patarkatsishvili's main slogan is "Georgia Without Saakashvili is Georgia without Terror." The key points of his program are:

- turning Georgia into a federal state, leaving only defense and the economy to the central authorities;
- moving from a presidential to a parliamentary system with a two-chamber parliament;
- giving due attention to the Patriarch's proposal of establishing a constitutional monarchy.

In the area of foreign policy, Patarkatsishvili maintains that "Georgia has no friends but only interests," which are both Russia and the United States. He believes Georgia's membership in NATO and European integration are fully in line with Georgia's interests, but would promote a "balance" between Russia and the United States in Georgian foreign relations.

Patarkatsishvili advocates an economic policy to:

- overcome poverty;
- provide employment;
- protect private property and create a favorable business environment;
- support private initiatives at the "start-up" stage.

¶23. See also reftel.

Levan Kidzinidze

¶24. Levan Kidzinidze is a political unknown who has collected 52,000 signatures. CEC returned to Kidzinidze his papers for verification of his list of supporters. Kidzinidze has to return the verified list by December 11.

Comment

¶25. Based on their platforms, the positions of all of the opposition candidates are united by three main features:

- personally targeting Saakashvili;
- appealing to the Georgian Orthodox believers;
- advocating complete change of the constitutional order of the country.

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